



Meeting with ProRail
Saturday, July 10, 2004, 9:30-11:30 AM

People in attendance

Members of ProRail

Ethan Johnson, WisDOT

- 1) Overview of ProRail Meeting: ProRail is the Madison-area chapter of the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers. In June 2004 ProRail asked the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) if it would speak at the group's regular meeting in July to provide an overview of the *Rail Issues & Opportunities Report*, a status report on the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, and an update on the new Connections 2030 plan. WisDOT representative Ethan Johnson spoke to ProRail on July 10, 2004.
- 2) Ethan gave an overview of the recently released Rail Issues & Opportunities Report. He reviewed the importance of rail to Wisconsin, noting that key industries rely on rail and are expected to grow, that rail is important for delivering coal to our power plants, that intermodal shipping is expected to grow, and that intercity passenger rail provides an important travel alternative.

Ethan reviewed Wisconsin's current rail system. It includes nearly 3,700 miles of track, most of it privately owned. He noted that a recent commodity forecast predicts growth in state freight tonnage of 51% by 2020 and that future freight traffic may be concentrated on fewer rail lines.

Ethan highlighted the nine major topics covered in the report:

- Rail congestion in Chicago;
- Intermodal facilities;
- Rail corridor and service preservation;
- Publicly owned rail infrastructure;
- Level of intercity passenger rail service;
- Hazardous materials;
- Motor vehicle/train crashes and trespassing;
- Railroad taxation; and
- Railroad regulations.

Ethan also highlighted three emerging rail issues:

- Commuter rail;
- Bans on the use of locomotive horns at roadway/railway crossings; and
- Proposals to reduce mercury emissions that could impact the rail industry.

- 3) Ethan provided more detailed information on the status of intercity passenger rail and the proposed Midwest Regional Rail System (MWRRS). He noted that Hiawatha Service ridership has been up significantly over the past eleven months. He also talked about a new Hiawatha Service advertising campaign that would begin later this year. He also discussed the on-going station development projects in downtown Milwaukee, at General Mitchell International Airport, and in Sturtevant.

Ethan discussed Amtrak's recent high-speed rail corridor development proposal, which included the Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison route.

Ethan also noted that the revised MWRRS Business Plan should be released later this year. The revised Plan reflects the use of 2000 Census data, a revised operating plan, more-detailed capital cost analyses and operating cost analyses.

- 4) Ethan provided an overview of Connections 2030, Wisconsin's next long-range transportation policy plan that will cover the time period out to 2030. He noted Connections 2030 will address all modes of transportation and will provide an aid to decision makers in deciding transportation-related questions. Ethan noted that Connections 2030 will be corridor-based and that some policies and measures will be corridor specific.

Ethan reviewed the Connections 2030 work that has been done to-date. WisDOT is developing a draft vision, goals and objectives. WisDOT is assessing where we are now and is developing forecasts of what things will be like in 25 years. WisDOT also is refining its "corridor concept". WisDOT has conducted "executive interviews" with 34 transportation stakeholders, it has conducted two focus groups, it has conducted a stateside telephone survey, and it is meeting with individual stakeholder groups. Ethan noted that all information gathered in the public outreach effort will be posted on WisDOT's Connections 2030 web site.

Ethan noted that WisDOT hopes to have Connections 2030 Plan Alternatives finished by July 2005, a Draft Plan available by December 2005, and a Final Plan completed by March 2006.

Ethan asked members of ProRail to fill out the Connections 2030 survey that he brought. He also encouraged ProRail members to join the mailing list, attend meetings, and visit the Connections 2030 web site.

- 5) Ethan and ProRail members engaged in a question-and-answer session. ProRail members asked Ethan about the recent announcement by Greyhound of service cutbacks in the state. ProRail members agreed that intercity bus service was an important component of Wisconsin's overall transportation system. Ethan noted that he didn't think the service cutbacks would affect Amtrak's feeder bus system in the state.

ProRail members asked questions about rail abandonments in the state and generally offered their support for rail service preservation.

ProRail members asked questions about the details of the station development projects and the MWRRS, including the train technologies that are being considered.